



Snohomish County
Planning and Development
Services

Visit us at :

2nd Floor Robert J. Drewel Bldg.
3000 Rockefeller Avenue
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ONLINE INFORMATION

www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1190



This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

Assistance Bulletin

#9

Revised March 2015

WWW.SNOCO.ORG

Keyword: Assistance Bulletins

Q: What is a variance?

A: A variance is an adjustment to specific regulations that apply to a particular piece of property. A variance is permission to modify certain development standards including bulk regulations or standards such as building setbacks, building height, etc. A variance may be granted only when there are special circumstances that apply to the property that are beyond the control of the applicant and where granting will not detrimentally affect other nearby properties.

The variance process cannot be used to allow the use of property in a manner not permitted by zoning regulations. For example, you cannot apply for a variance to permit an apartment complex in a zone that does not allow apartment uses.

Q: What are “special circumstances?”

A: Situations beyond the control of the applicant in which uniform code requirements would unduly burden one property more than other properties in the area. For example, if the rear portion of your lot is extremely steep and the only way you can construct a home on the property is to build part of the structure within a portion of the front-yard setback, you will need a variance to change the setback regulations.

Q: How do I know if I need a variance?

A: When you visit the PDS customer assistance counter on the 2nd Floor, Robert J. Drewel Building, 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, in downtown Everett, staff will point out the requirements of the zoning ordinance and tell you how and where your plan does not comply. If your plans are not in compliance, you will then alter your plans to meet code requirements before you can get a building permit.

Q: What if I can't alter my plans?

A: If you cannot alter your project to meet code, you may consider the possibility of obtaining a variance. Review the variance application, criteria, and related materials to determine if you may be eligible. The application contains four questions known as the “variance criteria” that must be answered by you about the request:

- Are there special circumstances which apply to the subject property and/or the intended use (such as shape, location or surroundings) which generally do not apply to other properties in the vicinity?

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change.
For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

- Is the variance necessary to preserve and/or enjoy a substantial property right that others in the vicinity have but is denied to this property because of special circumstances?
- Will the variance be detrimental to the public welfare or harmful to the properties in the vicinity?
- Would the variance adversely affect the county's comprehensive plan?

You are responsible for submitting complete, adequately written answers to the above questions as part of the variance application.

Q: How do I get a variance?

A: First, complete the variance application, including the criteria supplement, and submit both by visiting the Customer Support Center, 2nd Floor Robert J. Drewel Building. (If you are submitting a shoreline variance, you will need to schedule a submittal appointment.) You will pay a filing fee to help defray the processing costs. You will be given Pending Land Use Action signs and posting instructions for placement of the signs on the property.

PDS is responsible for application review and issuing a decision on a variance request. A variance decision is a Type 1 administrative decision that is made using the procedures of chapters 30.70 and 30.71 SCC. Public notice of a variance application will be provided by mail to all property owners within 500 feet of your property. Published notice and property posting are also required.

Q: When will a decision be made on my variance application?

A: PDS will render a written decision on your variance application within 120 days from when the permit application is determined to be complete. This decision will contain findings of fact and conclusions. Appeal instructions are in the decision document for anyone who wishes to appeal the decision to the hearing examiner.